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ABSTRACT

The article discusses two provisions--least restrictive environment and the individualized education program--generated by P.L. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Priorities for effective mainstreaming are considered, and opposition to the least restrictive environment concept is examined. It is concluded that the key to P.L. 94-142 is threefold: (1) that schools assess each child's ability, (2) that schools design an individualized education program that meets the child's educational needs, and (3) that schools assure that parental participation and due process procedures become components in all phases of the undertaking. (SBH)

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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE HANDICAPPED

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Enactment of Public Law 94-142, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, can be equated to Brown v. Board of Education as to impact and reaction by state and local educational systems. The central thrust of Brown focused upon the concept that all children must be afforded equal educational opportunities and that segregated schooling is strongly contrasted to that policy. Public Law 94-142, on the other hand, infers, and rightly so, that the special educational needs of the handicapped have not been fully met.

Chief Justice Warren, delivering the opinion of the court in Brown, emphasized the importance of education and the right of every individual to receive an education equal in opportunities.

> Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state had undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms (Kirp and Yudof, 1974, p. 294).

The opinion of the court in Brown differs minutely from the purpose of Public Law 94-142 as related in the Congressional Record - House.

> It is the purpose of this bill to assure that all handicapped children . . . , a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that the rights of handicapped children and their parents or guardians are protected... (p. H11212).

In essence the litigation of Brown and the enactment of the Act clearly mandate that all children should have the same opportunity in the schools they attend.

The "stepchild" stereotype experienced by handicapped children a century and a half ago resulted in these children being shunted aside by the bulk of American society. Since the 1930's, the number of youth enrolled in special education programs has vastly increased. Brenton (1974) elaborates by stating, "As late as the Depression years, most school systems were neither philosophically nor financially prepared to offer educational programs for many of their handicapped youths. But since 1948, the number of handicapped boys and girls receiving special education services of all kinds has increased an astonishing sixfold" (p. 21).

The laissez-faire attitude depicted by Brenton is misleading especially to parents of handicapped children in Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia. In Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education, a landmark decision for handicapped children, Judge Joseph C. Waddly, in rendering the 1972 decree, stated, "The District of Columbia shall provide to each child of school age a free and suitable publicly supported education regardless of the degree of the child's mental, physical or emotional disability or impairment" (Federal Supplement, 348, p. 878). Moreover, insufficient funds was an inexcusable defense for failing to comply as warned by Judge Waddly: "Furthermore, defendants shall not exclude any child resident in the District of Columbia from such publicly supported education on the basis of a claim of insufficient resources..." (Federal Supplement, 348, p. 878).

A forerunner of Mills, the class action of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was brought by the "parents of thirteen individual retarded children on behalf of all mentally retarded persons between the ages of 6 and 21 whom the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, through its local school districts and intermedial units, is presently excluding from a program of education and training in the public schools" (Federal Supplement, 343, p. 281-282). District Judge Masterson eloquently echoes the right of each individual to be offered educational opportunities based on the child's abilities rather than the whims of educators in the court's closing remarks:

> We have absolutely no hesitation about approving the Agreement as fair and reasonable to the plaintiffs. Approval means that plaintiff retarded children who heretofore had been excluded from a public program of education and training will no longer be so excluded after September 1, 1972. This is a noble and humanitarian end in which the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has chosen

> to join. Today, with the following Order, this group of citizens will have new hope in their quest for a life of dignity and self-sufficiency (Federal Supplement, 343, p. 302).

The genesis of P. L. 94-142 was, in part, founded upon the litigation exemplified in Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and additional cases so prominent during the early 1970's, yet time and space mandate closure.

Three important provisions generated by P. L. 94-142 are that educational opportunities must be provided in accordance with due process procedures, that placement must be determined in a manner consistent with the doctrine of the least restrictive environment, and that local systems will establish or revise an individualized education program for each handicapped child at the beginning of each school year. Parental participation has been excluded due to its integration as a significant component in each of the listed provisions. This paper will address itself to only two of the three components: least restrictive environment and the individualized education program.

Least Restrictive Environment

The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 makes a number of stipulations that must be adhered to by both state and local educational systems. One such requirement of particular interest to the classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and the administrator is placement in the "least restrictive environment." Infrequently this one segment has been misconceptualized to such extreme that individuals construe the entire Act as the "Mainstreaming Act." Although the terms are synonymous, the Act does not mandate mainstreaming; however, the Act does state that handicapped children should be "educated with children who are not handicapped" unless "the nature or the severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Mainstreaming, as defined by Brenton (1974), "means moving handicapped children from their segregated status in special education classes and integrating them with 'normal' children in regular classrooms" (p. 23). Professor Birch (Milbauer, 1977) addresses the term mainstreaming in similar terms as Brenton; however, he retains and emphasizes the continued interaction between special education personnel and student: "enrolling and teaching exceptional children in regular classes for the majority of the school day under the charge of the regular class teacher, and assuring that

the exceptional child receives special education of high quality to the extent it is needed during that time and any other time" (p. 44). Mainstreaming is not a new concept but the gusto for it is (Roubinek, 1977; Brenton, 1974; Kavanagh, 1977).

Kavanagh (1977) relates that during the late 1960's mainstreaming was termed the "panacea for exceptional children in the public schools" (p. 319). However, a premature initiation of the mainstreaming process was greeted with expectancies being seldom realized. Kavanagh (1977) accentuates the lack of planning as the detriment to success:

> Specialists had initiated the mainstreaming process before schools, administrators, teachers, and most important of all, the children were ready for the plunge. Indeed, in many instances the only ones who were prepared were the special educators, who had little to lose, for, by their own choice, they would no longer be held primarily responsible for the education of these children (p. 319).

Seemingly, the first priority for effective mainstreaming is twofold: (1) integrate the efforts of classroom teachers, special education personnel and administrators and (2) work as a unit to perfect the most appropriate education for these handicapped youngsters.

A mainstreaming survey (Table I), although lacking validity and reliability, signifies that mainstreaming per se is being attempted in a number of the elementary, middle, and high schools surveyed. However, a chief concern must be levied upon the "nongradual process" of mainstreaming. Kavanagh (1977) warns that inadequate preparation results in the handicapped child becoming an outcast and a failure and urges a gradual process of mainstreaming: "If the transition from special to regular class is a slow, gradual process, many fears and anxities may be alleviated" (p. 321). To this end Martin (1977) concurs by stating, "What we must do, however, is to assess each child's abilities and to offer educational opportunity based on the child's abilities and not place children in special settings for the administrative convenience of the school system or, worse, to meet our unconscious fears of the disabled" (p. 46).

Cochrane and Westling (1977) maintain that the likelihood of success is enhanced if mainstreaming is viewed as a team effort. They present ten practical suggestions to help diminish the intensity of problems intrinsic to the process of mainstreaming.

(1) Principals should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.

TABLE I

Mainstreaming Survey

TOPIC	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Handicapped Self-contained			
Positive Reply	14	3	15
Negative Reply	13	6	10
Mainstreaming Per Se	20	7	19
Mainstreaming Technique			
Gradual Process	15	4	14
Nongradual Process	5	3	3
N's	27	9	25

Note: Two respondents failed to signify mainstreaming technique.

(2) Regular classroom teachers should become cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped children.

(3) The principal should provide additional sources of information on exceptional child education.

(4) The principal should utilize special education personnel as support personnel.

(5) The principal should consider alternatives for support.

(6) The principal should utilize community resources.

(7) The principal should allow for special materials funds for the regular educator.

(8) The principal should encourage teachers to educate normal children about handicaps.

(9) The principal should provide support for the exceptional child.

(10) The principal should provide support for the faculty. (p. 507-509)

For principals the words of Edmonds (1976) echo the main reason for P. L. 94-142: "If we hold ourselves accountable for educating these children in the mainstreaming, rather than segregating and labeling them as 'special,' it is possible to provide a richer educational environment for all the children in the school community" (p. 425).

Individualized Education Program

Not too many years in the past, principals, whether elementary or middle school, grew professionally with only two options involving children with handicaps: either mainstream with little or no assistance for the classroom teacher or isolate in self-contained special education classrooms. A third service must be recognized by educators: to assure an individualized educational program for all handicapped persons. The program, as related by Public Law 94-142 (Congressional Record - House, 1975), means a written statement with the following content:

> (A) a statement of the present levels of educational performance of such child, (B) a statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives, (C) a statement of the specific educational services to be provided to such child, and the extent to which such child will be able to participate in regular educational programs, (D) the projected date for initiation and anticipated duration of such services, and (E) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved (p. H11214).

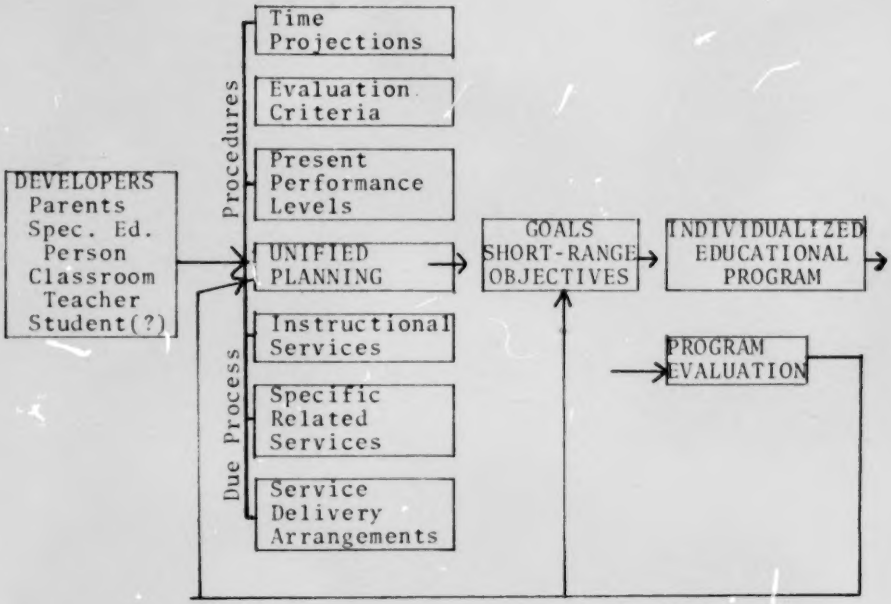
For Georgia educators the effective date is October 1, 1977; however, under P. L. 94-142, the effective date is September 1, 1978.

Reducing the lenghty terminology of the individualized program to simplicity, Milbauer (1977) states that the written statement "is to include an analysis of the child's present achievement level, a listing of both short-range and annual goals, an identification of specific services that will be provided toward meeting those goals and an indication of the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular school programs" (p. 45). Martin (1976), on the other hand, foresees the need of individualized program guidelines: "...it will probably be necessary for the Bureau to devise minimum standards to assure that the individual plan reflects the goals of Congress in writing the portion of the Act" (p. 291).

The Individualized Educational Program Model illustrates the many components necessary for a feasible program. Note that due process procedures influence individual components throughout the unified planning segment and should prevail in every phase of the model. Administrators and faculty, utilizing the model as a guide, should be able to perfect an individualized educational program not only suitable for future guidelines associated with P. L. 94-142 but geared to the individual abilities of each handicapped student.

MODEL I

Individualized Educational Program



Opposition

Public Law 94-142, especially in the area of least restrictive environment, will have its opposition and will abound in success stories. On the cheerful side, East (1976) relates, "As for mainstreaming, I learned a big lesson that year: Only a classroom full of 'normal' children could have set the examples Bill needed to improve his faulty speech and coordination" (p. 71). On the opposite end of a continuum, Brenton (1974) warns that some special education personnel are antagonistic toward mainstreaming. He accentuates the assertion by stating, "They fear that the gains made on

behalf of handicapped children will be wiped out, and they are not happy about the drastic changes their own accustomed professional approaches will have to undergo" (p. 25). Martin (1977) adds to the negativeness by stating that friends of the handicapped fear "the 'mainstreaming' may be distorted and result in offering children with handicaps less intensive education than they require" (p. 46).

Hapeman (1977) presents many sound reservations as to the effect of P. L. 94-142 upon the education of the visually impaired. Opinionated that public institutions cannot supply the training and reinforcement of non-academic skills required by all visually impaired children, Hapeman presents three sound arguments:

(1) Although P. L. 94-142 recognizes a need for in-service training, it is naive to expect each public school teacher to be adequately trained to effectively teach children in each area of special education.

(2) It is not in the best interest of most visually handicapped children to abruptly transfer public funds to schools whose personnel are untrained and uncommitted to work with handicapped children from schools in which all personnel are specifically trained and committed.

(3) Even discounting the increasing restrictions of all public school students as a result of growing inflation and the social problems of large, crowded schools, it is difficult to comprehend that a public school staffed by personnel who are untrained in adoptive techniques for working with handicapped children, who hold stereotypic attitudes about blindness and blind persons, and whose expectations and permissiveness are extremely limiting, can be realistically considered a less restrictive environment (p. 34-35).

Seemingly, biased in his assertions and attitudes toward the public classroom teacher, Hapeman fears that P. L. 94-142, which is welcome and desirable, "has the potential of erasing 75 years of gains made for visually handicapped children and their parents" (p. 36).

Another facet encompasses the concepts of special education personnel. What are their thoughts as they shed the cloak of self-contained classrooms and don the garb of resource person? Roubinek (1977) contemplates the prementioned fact by stating, "Teachers who are experienced in the self-contained special education classroom may find much security in their present situation and feel uncomfortable about changing their role in the school" (p. 44).

Conclusions

There exists little doubt as to the immediate impact of P. L. 94-142 upon the educational scene; however, fears and misconceptions have plagued its anticipated beginning in 1978. Furthermore, it has been erroneously labeled the "Mainstreaming Act," although the wording merely states that handicapped children will be educated with non-handicapped children to the maximum extent appropriate.

The key to Public Law 94-142 is threefold: (1) that schools assess each child's ability, (2) that schools design an individualized educational program that meets the child's educational needs, and (3) that schools assure that parental participation and due process procedures become components in all phases of the undertaking. One pitfall is the serious mistake of deciding what is best for all handicapped children as a group. When we as administrators approach decisions on this basis, we either retain all handicapped children in the self-contained classroom or we alleviate the problem by mainstreaming them all.

One essential element in the role of principal, regardless of school affiliation, is leadership; and this simple constituent is of chief significance during the implementation of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. If the least restrictive environment is to be more than an administrative disposition, it must receive moral and active support by the principal. Furthermore, the faculty must perceive the principal as favoring the mainstreaming concept. Finally, the principal must be cognizant that complications will materialize, and that he must rekindle self-concepts that mainstreaming can be achieved successfully and for the benefit of all.

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FROM THE DESK OF:

Howard Stroud

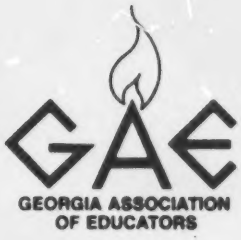
President

Georgia Association of Middle School Principals

In the past few years, much has been written about helping the middle school youngster find his/her identity. While much of this work still goes on and must continue, another task has been added which may have a great deal to do with the effectiveness of efforts to accomplish the first. The additional task in the identity syndrome is the cry from administrators throughout the nation of the need "to identify my role." Administrators have long been told that they are the instructional leaders. This was repeated in trip-hammer fashion so often by training institutions, employers, and educational influencers until most principals believed, themselves, that they were really supervising instruction. Nobody ever told them that managing the lunchroom, filling out all kinds of forms, being shackled and hamstrung by discipline and other administrative potpourri were really not the role for which they had been made to believe they would carry out. Nobody ever made it quite clear that the instructional supervision role in which they were to function boiled down to "trivia" or "administrativia."

One must admit that these things must receive their fair share of good supervision because they have an indirect bearing on academic effectiveness. Due to the many changes brought about in education and the coerced re-evaluation of the instructional role of the principal, today's principal is beginning to search anew for that elusive role he was made to believe he would fill, if indeed it existed. The first rude awakening he gets is that he cannot identify the areas of professional competence that a good principal must assume or is expected to assume. His frustration is further heightened because he is too astute not to realize that he must either change, or be eliminated, or self-destruct. It has also been manifested to him that retraining and reorientation is definitely necessary if he is to fully possess those enlightened qualities of leadership required for future productive professional success. Caught up in this maze of educational jargon, little wonder the principal is thrashing about seeking to identify his role expectation in the fulfillment of his task.

Many principals now realize they must define areas of professional administrative competence in terms of what the competent principal does. If the principal is to find his role then it must be viewed as a broader and more



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